

12. Buying Power Like Simon or Serving in the Power of Christ

Many leaders in the world today think they can use their money to buy power. Such people can often buy power in business or government. Unfortunately, some religious leaders follow the example of people in the world and try to buy spiritual power. Since Christ freely gives us all things, the only person that sells spiritual power is Satan. He gives people power to steal, to kill, and to destroy. At the same time, he is in the process of destroying those who are trying to buy spiritual power. We will meet one such person in our study today.

In Acts 8:18-23, we read, “And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, ‘Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’ But Peter said to him, ‘Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.’” Here, we see that Simon thought he could buy spiritual power.

To understand his thinking, we need to understand his past. Acts 8:9-11 says, “But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, ‘This man is the great power of God.’ And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time.” Simon had practiced witchcraft among the people of Samaria for many years.

We see that while he was practicing witchcraft, there were several characteristics in his life. He had been able to astonish the people. He had claimed to be a great person. He had been able to control the people. He had been able to make the people think that his power came from God. He had been able to control and hold power over the people for many years. Here, we see a man that had deceived the people. Acts 8:13 says, “Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.” Here, we see that he even professed to become a Christian, because he was amazed by the power of God. That is what caused him to want to buy spiritual power.

Simon saw this as an opportunity to buy greater power so he would be able to exercise even greater power and control over the people. Simon was ready to pay to buy that power. Peter told him that the gift of God could not be purchased with money. Peter also told him that his heart was not right with God. Peter told him he needed to repent of his wickedness. Peter told him that he needed to pray and ask God to forgive him the thought of his heart. Peter told him that he was filled with bitterness. Peter told him that he was in bondage to sin. Simon shows us that there are people who claim to be spiritual leaders who think and act like the world, instead of thinking and acting like Christ.

In contrast, Luke 4:14-15 says, “Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news

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of Him went out through all the surrounding region. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.” Here, we see that Christ carried out His ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit. His concern was to teach the people, instead of trying to control the people. One of the best ways to control people is to keep them ignorant of the Word of God. One of the best ways to serve and empower Christians is to teach them the Word of God and show them how to apply it in their daily lives. Then, they are also able to serve others effectively.

In Romans 15:18-19, we read, “For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient--in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.” Here, we see that Paul had learned to serve Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. This produced several results. He was able to be an example by his words. He was able to be an example by his actions. He was able to show the Gentiles how to be obedient to the Lord. He was able to preach the Gospel wherever he went.

Romans 6 gives us three key words to help us learn how to serve in the power of the Holy Spirit. First, Romans 6:8-10 says, “Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.” We are to **know** that we died with Christ and that we live with Him. Since death has no more control over Him, Christ lives to serve God.

Second, Romans 6:11 says, “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The word **reckon** is an accounting word and means *to put something to our account*. Here, we see we are dead to sin, and life in Christ has been put to our account. The fact that we are dead to sin means that we no longer are under the control of the sinful desires of the flesh. The fact that we live with Christ, and death no longer has control over us, means that we have also been given the power to live to God.

Third, Romans 6:13, 16 says, “And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God...Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” The word **present** or **yield** means *to place our lives under the control of something*. If we place ourselves under the control of sin, we will live a miserable sinful life. If we place ourselves under the control of God, He is able to give us the power to obey the Word of God so that we are able to live a righteous life and serve in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 7:14-25 tells us what will happen if we depend on ourselves as Christians. Since we are powerless in our own strength, we are actually placing our lives under the control of sin when we depend on ourselves. Romans 7:18-20 says, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I

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will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.” As Christians, when we depend on our own strength, we have a desire to do good, but we do not have the power to do good. We plan to do good, but then, do not do it. We plan to avoid evil, but we end up doing evil anyway.

We realize that we are living almost the same way we lived before we became Christians. There is just one difference. Now, we have a desire to do good, but we do not have the power to do good in our own strength. Romans 7:24 summarizes how we think and feel when we depend on our own strength. That verse says, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” Here, we see that a Christian who is depending on his own strength has constant inner conflicts in his thoughts.

In the first seven chapters of Romans, the Holy Spirit is mentioned only four times and chapter seven concludes with this terrible inner conflict. In contrast, chapter eight mentions the Holy Spirit nineteen times. We saw that Christ served in the power of the Holy Spirit. At each moment we are yielding our lives to God, we can serve in the power of the Holy Spirit. His Spirit gives us the power to obey God and be obedient to the things He commands in His Word.

In chapter 7, we see that the Christian who depends on his own strength has constant inner conflict. In contrast, the Christian who is learning to yield control of his life to the Holy Spirit and serve the Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit has a completely different view of life. Romans 8:35-37 says, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” Here, we see that Christians have a choice. We can either live wretched miserable lives, or we can be more than conquerors that are motivated by the love of Christ.

As we have the opportunity to help spiritual leaders develop, one of the things we help them realize is that they have choices. They can be worldly leaders, like Simon, who desire power and become controlled by bitterness. They can be spiritual leaders who depend on their own strength and experience tremendous failure and inner conflict. They can make the choice to present their lives to God, so they serve Him in the power of the Holy Spirit and experience what it is like to have lives that can be described as being more than conquerors regardless of what they face. May the Lord richly bless you, as you show godly leaders how to serve the Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit.